



For Immediate Release

Apeejay Tea & WWF-India partnership to reduce the impact of Human-Elephant Conflict in Assam

Kolkata, 9 April 2015: Apeejay Tea and WWF-India today announced their partnership for finding lasting solutions to prevent and manage Human-Elephant Conflict (HEC) in Assam by implementing a three-year, exhaustive management strategy in the most affected elephant landscapes of the state.

Focused on decreasing human and elephant mortality levels substantially from that recorded in 2013, the first phase of work of this alliance will commence immediately with an intensive conflict management effort in Sonitpur district.

Speaking about the partnership, **Mr. Ravi Singh, SG & CEO, WWF India** said, *“The unprecedented fragmentation of elephant habitats has isolated resident wild elephants leading to an increase in conflict with people living in such landscapes. WWF-India has been working relentlessly towards managing this conflict in Assam. We welcome Apeejay Tea’s interest in thinking beyond securing their own tea estates in Sonitpur from wild elephant attacks, and considering a holistic approach at reducing wildlife conflict in the entire state. The partnership has the potential to set an example for collaboration in this region for the benefit of both people and wildlife.”*

Over the past few years, HEC has become more severe with large volumes of crops getting destroyed, people getting killed, and ultimately elephants being killed in retaliation. Sonitpur, the second largest district in Assam, is also known to have historically borne the brunt of HEC, recording the most human deaths and damage to crops in the state for years. In Sonitpur, there have been 206 human and 131 elephant fatalities between 1996 and 2009. More than 50% HEC related human deaths have been recorded from the tea estates. From 2001 to 2014, out of 245 people who died in Sonitpur due to HEC, 128 people are from the tea estates. The large number of people killed by elephants escalated in 2001 leading to 32 elephants being killed in retaliation in a single year.

Apeejay Tea, one of India’s largest and oldest tea producers, has four tea estates in the “hot zone” – Dhulapadung, Ghoirallie, Borjuli and Sessa -- in Sonitpur district. Speaking about the alliance, **Mr. A K Bhargava, MD, Apeejay Tea**, said, *“By making this commitment, Apeejay Tea in partnership with WWF-India, recognizes the need for bringing into action a sustainable plan for minimizing and resolving human elephant conflict in the tea gardens of Assam, a plan which can be easily replicated by other impacted tea estates. So far, Apeejay Tea has done its best to work with other NGOs and Forest Department of Assam to conserve and protect wild life, including elephants. Our approach has been ‘our home and theirs’. A better and stronger and sustainable coexistence strategy was needed as the forest habitats of elephants have depleted rapidly and more and more animals have sought shelter in our estates.”*



An Apeejay Surrendra Enterprise

The three-year project entails building on the very successful 10 year old “Sonitpur Model” enhancing its scope and impact with the focus on piloting new ideas in view of the severity of damage and loss shouldered by the tea estates as revealed in the statistics above. WWF-India has been actively working on elephant conservation and HEC management in the Sonitpur district since 2004, along with the Department of Forests, Government of Assam, community groups and a civil society organization called District Community Development Programme. A unique, ongoing model of HEC management set up by this alliance, now referred to as the ‘Sonitpur model’ – that includes the use of *kunki* or captive elephants to drive wild elephants from fields and tea estates, training anti-depredation teams to facilitate elephant drives and empowering the local community – has shown a marked decrease in human deaths and reduction in crop and property damage over the last decade.

The way the project will address the key issues are:

- A matrix will be developed to calculate the quantum of loss that is usually borne by the tea estates on account of damage to property, including tea bushes and shade trees, infrastructure and injuries among residents.
- This matrix will bring the issue in strategic focus and will attract attention and investment for a new agenda for adaptation and management that would benefit the state, region and country.
- Mapping of the new paths that elephants have established, to move away from forest areas, will be done for the first time in the tea gardens
- Securing elephant movement path adjacent to Sessa, an Apeejay Tea garden in Sonitpur, will be the start point for tracking and early warning of elephants on the move.
- The route used by elephants through Sessa Tea Estate will be formalized as a movement corridor.
- The corridor will be hedged by a bio fence, in place of the electric fence that has been the norm so far. This is the first time that bio fencing will be used as protection that is safe for elephants and other wild life.
- The nurseries for growing the thorny bamboo will be inside the Apeejay Tea estates in Sonitpur. The nurseries will be replicated in other Apeejay Tea locations in Upper Assam in the next two years.

Further, a structure to monitor HEC in Sonitpur district and replicate it in Nagaon, Golaghat, Sibsagar and Tinsukia districts will be developed. As part of the comprehensive management plan, 16 monitors will be put in place in various strategic locations of the district to gather maximum information of the raiding elephants and damage done. Apeejay Tea and WWF-India envisage a substantial reduction in conflict and mortality rates of both humans and elephants.



For Media Queries Please Contact

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About Apeejay Tea:

Apeejay Tea, an Apeejay Surrendra Enterprise, is amongst India's oldest and 3rd largest tea producer. It has 17 tea estates in the prime tea growing areas of Tinsukia, Sivasagar and Sonitpur District of Assam spread over 50,000 acres. The Estates are ISO 9001: 2008 certified and are under Ethical Tea Partnership. Two premium estates Khobong & Budlabeta are HACCP Certified and nine of the estates are Rainforest Alliance Certified and all the estates follow the Sustainable Agricultural Network standards. Apeejay Tea acquired Typhoo, UK's third largest and an over 100-year-old iconic British tea brand, in 2005 which is today retailing in nearly 50 countries globally including India. To know more, you could visit us at www.apeejaytea.com

About WWF-India:

WWF-India is one of the largest conservation organizations in the country, engaged in wildlife and nature conservation. It has an experience of over four decades in the field and has made its presence felt through a sustained effort not only towards nature and wildlife conservation, but also through sensitizing people by creating awareness through capacity building and enviro-legal activism. The key areas of the work of WWF-India include conservation of key wildlife species and their habitats, management of rivers, wetlands and their eco-systems, promoting sustainable livelihoods, environment education and awareness activities within a variety of social structures, mitigating the impacts of climate change, transforming businesses and markets towards sustainability and combating illegal wildlife trade.

A part of WWF International, one of the world's largest and most respected independent conservation organizations, with over 5 million supporters and a global network active in over 100 countries. WWF-India has a nationwide presence in the country with over 60 state and field offices distributed over 20 states. WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the earth's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by conserving the world's biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable, and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption. To know more about WWF-India, you could visit us at www.wwfindia.org.